

Putting Programs and Policies Into Practice Throughout Latin America

It all comes down to individuals—even the best policies and programs would prove ineffective without people to carry them out. In this article, FAS attachés in Latin American countries offer highlights on how Post personnel are working to strengthen U.S.-Latin American ties.

Caribbean Basin

In 2003, the FAS CBATO (Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office) is considering applicants for training in various procedures and techniques, such as produce handling, supermarket merchandising and new product introduction, the U.S. food safety program for consumer group representatives; the U.S. food safety program for government regulators; training in biotechnology for Caribbean scien-

tists and professors involved in local agricultural production; and meat and poultry inspection for government meat inspection officials.

“Our office has conducted numerous training courses through the Cochran Fellowship Program in such activities as supermarket management/food retailing systems, handling and marketing of produce, wines, meats and dairy products and HACCP [Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Point] systems,” said Omar González, deputy director of the CBATO.

One group in the CBATO Cochran Program attended a two-week program at St. Joseph’s University in Pennsylvania that focused on current trends in consumer-ready foods and provided information on inventory control, quality control, customer service, handling, merchandising and promoting food items at the retail level. The group visited local supermarkets, distribution centers and processing

plants. The group also attended the annual FMI (Food Marketing Institute) show in Chicago and met with U.S. trade contacts.

Another group began with an intensive seminar at the University of California at Davis on the produce marketing system, which covered handling and distribution of produce from grower to packer-shipper to retailer, as well as processing, packaging and labeling, retailing and new technology. The participants then toured California, Washington and Oregon to meet fruit and vegetable growers, processors and suppliers. They also visited the Produce Marketing Association exposition in Monterey, California.

“Another CBATO Cochran Program effort targeted wine distributors, chefs of upscale hotels and restaurants and food and beverage journalists,” González said. “Participants went to vineyards in California, Washington and Oregon to



learn about wine production from vine to barrel.” A course at the University of California at Davis covered such topics as effects of aging on wine taste and value, pairing of wines with spices and sauces and marketing.

Still another Cochran effort gave participants an understanding of handling and marketing systems for meats, dairy products and fresh fruits. Participants traveled with a buyer education team from USMEF (the U.S. Meat Export Federation, an MAP and cooperator program participant), and attended USMEF’s foreign buyer conference.

Participants learned about pork and beef grading; beef use in the food service industry; computer software for under-utilized cuts; and portion control. They visited processors and packers, and took a short course put on by Texas A&M University for an in-depth look at beef cattle evaluation; carcass grading; inspection and food safety; factors affecting leanness and palatability; meat cutting rules and methods; and wholesale and retail cut techniques.

Participants then studied dairy product handling and marketing through a program designed by the Wisconsin State Department of Agriculture, which covered quality, processing, storage and transportation of dairy products.

“A course on the U.S. HACCP system for importers, distributors and food inspectors and policy makers provides information on the distribution, handling and storage of meat and poultry products, and includes a tour of manufacturing and distribution facilities that have effectively implemented the HACCP system.

“The HACU [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities] intern program also has furthered CBATO’s mission,”



At work in the CBATO: coop student Angel González and HACU interns Isabel Dávila and Roberto González.

Omar González, FAS

González said. “HACU interns have conducted market research on exporting U.S. food and beverage products to the Caribbean, organized international conferences, arranged sales missions for U.S. exporters, participated in trade shows and managed computer systems and communications.” Through USDA’s Public Service Scholarship Program, the CBATO also has a Hispanic cooperative student from Puerto Rico.

Mexico

The Office of Agricultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City oversees USDA activities in Mexico, with particular emphasis on government-to-government relations and trade policy.

“FAS also has ATOs in Mexico City and Monterrey that take the lead in market promotion, training and export credit activities,” said Bruce Zanin, director of ATO Mexico City.

Recent and planned marketing activities of FAS Mexican Posts include:

- a videoconference with agribusiness exporters from Fresno, California
- USA Pavilions at the Expocarne, Expohotel, ANTAD and ABASTUR trade shows
- an information booth at the Alimentaria trade show in Mexico City
- an in-store promotion in northern Mexico



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- restaurant menu promotion
 - buying missions to the United States
- Training activities include:
- a training session in Maine and a Boston Seafood Show visit for Mexican seafood importers
 - a trip to Michigan for Mexican chefs for training in use of apples, blueberries, cherries and cranberries in conjunction with the Mid-America International Trade Council
 - ATO staff presentations on the Mexican market at the FMI and NRA (National Restaurant Association) trade shows

- training for feed suppliers, dealers and distributors from Mexico's border on U.S. cottonseed meal purchasing
- training for hardwood importers in Ohio, West Virginia and mid-Atlantic states on U.S. hardwood varieties and their uses
- training through USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service for Mexican government officials on meat and poultry handling and safety
- training through the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on animal health inspection for Mexican government officials

- biotechnology training for Mexican government officials
- training on the U.S. grain handling system for Mexican government officials

Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama

The FAS office in San José has oversight for Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. Eight Foreign Service nationals serve in the three countries, all local hires.

The United States is working on CAFTA (the Central America Free Trade Agreement) with the Central American Common Market, which includes Costa Rica and Nicaragua, among others.

CAFTA is expected to increase market share of certain U.S. commodities and provide U.S. producers and exporters access to the region for many items that currently face high duties and other trade restrictions. "Throughout the year, there will be ongoing negotiations on CAFTA, which will alternate among the United States and the other countries involved," said Alan Hrapsky, agricultural attaché in San José.

"Our major marketing work this year centers around recruiting for major U.S. food shows," Hrapsky continued. "In addition, and the U.S. Embassy may host a large trade delegation from Louisiana."

Colombia

Colombia is the largest market for U.S. agricultural products in South America; U.S. exports to that country totaled \$484.8 million in fiscal 2002, up 10 percent from a year earlier.

The FAS office at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota has five Colombian employees.

"Colombia is very interested in free trade with the United States," noted attaché David J. Mergen. "Negotiations on the Free Trade Area of the Americas are closely followed, and the local industry is actively preparing for its eventual implementation."

Renewal last year of the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act [ATPDEA, formerly the Andean Trade Preference Act] reduced to zero the tariffs on numerous products exported to the United States, and is expected to generate a substantial increase in employment, particularly in the textile sector. Colombia recently requested a bilateral free trade agreement with the United States.

Colombia is active in the Cochran Program, sending 31 participants to the United States for training in fiscal 2002. "We support marketing activities, and had a budget of \$55,000 last year," Mergen continued. "We focused on sending Colombian buyers to U.S. food shows like the FMI, NRA, Food and Beverages of



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the Americas and Fancy Food events."

The Post organized a seminar on river transportation. Its goals were to lower the cost of exporting U.S. grains to Colombia and foster economic growth by improving the transportation infrastructure.

"We are also encouraging Colombia to participate in the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program to increase overall food availability and improve nutrition for the large number of extremely poor students," Mergen said.

"Approval last year of the ATPDEA expanded duty-free access to the U.S. market for Colombian textiles, which is generating growth in Colombian employment and increased opportunities for U.S. cotton and yarn exports," Mergen continued. "We are encouraging firms to use USDA's GSM-102 Export Credit Guarantee Program to ensure that local companies have the credit necessary to expand and to ensure that the United States remains Colombia's main supplier of cotton."

Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay

The FAS office in Buenos Aires covers Argentina and oversees Uruguay and Paraguay. "These three countries have a combined population of roughly 45 million, and cover an enormous geographic



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area approximately the size of an area stretching from Cuba to the Hudson Bay in northern Canada,” said agricultural counselor Philip A. Shull.

The office has several Argentines on staff. “Comprising most of the fertile and extremely competitive Southern Cone of the continent and three of the four countries of the free trade association of MERCOSUR, it is a key Latin American post for trade policy, marketing and reporting,” noted Shull.

“Our trade policy efforts have focused on expanding our alliance with Argentina and Uruguay in biotechnology, and trying to convince the Paraguayan government to rescind its prohibition on planting biotech varieties,” Shull continued. The office is pursuing the latter goal through sponsoring seminars in all three countries, and taking some of their key officials to the United States.

“In our continuous efforts to open markets with this region, we have sponsored food safety and handling programs to familiarize officials and traders with the U.S. regulatory system,” Shull said. “Establishing excellent contacts throughout government and the private sector, through individual meetings and through public speaking, is essential to this work.”

To expand markets for U.S. food and agricultural products, the Post has employed buying missions, taking

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For technical assistance and training available to U.S.-based small- and medium-sized food processors and other U.S.-based businesses interested in doing business with Latin American countries, contact:

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importers to the United States to meet exporters and to attend trade shows, and menu promotions. “The current economic crisis in this region and the comparatively high value of the U.S. dollar have produced incentives for development of a local food industry, and created new opportunities for U.S. food ingredient exporters,” Shull noted.

“We have therefore designed several activities to educate importers and processors about these products, and to introduce them to U.S. suppliers. While the American officers provide overall guidance and supervision, the implementation and success of these efforts depend upon the contacts, skill and professionalism of the local staff,” Shull concluded. ■

